

"The Law Of God Is Good"

St. John's – East Moline

Exodus 20:1-17

03/03/24

Intro.: We live in a time when the Word of God has fallen into disfavor among many, perhaps even most, of the people around us. The authority of Scripture has been attacked on many sides, even by so-called Christian scholars. It has become common to see television shows belittling and mocking the Scriptures that God has given us. In the face of all this, however, we continue to turn to the inspired and inerrant Word of God delivered to us by prophets, apostles, and evangelists as the power of God for our salvation and our guide for living as His people.

Today's Old Testament reading begins with the children of Israel gathered around Mt. Sinai, upon which God had descended with fire. The mountain trembled and God called Moses to come and meet with him. Our reading tells us, ***"And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.'"***

God cared about these people that He had delivered and wanted to protect them from things that would be hurtful to their body and soul. That is why God gave them the Ten Commandment to guide them in their relationship as His covenant people. They would live as His consecrated people, and He would bless them. In each of the first three commandments, he spoke of their relationship with Him. And then, the remaining commandments would govern their relationship with other people. Jesus summarized these commandments by saying, ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** This moral law, along with the ceremonial law, would guide the Israelites as they entered the land that God was giving them. It should be obvious by this that God gave the Law for the good of His people.

I. God's Law Reflects His Will For His Rescued, Chosen People.

A. God begins the giving of His Law by reminding the people at Sinai of His mercy in delivering them from their slavery. In chapter 19 He told them, ***"You, yourselves, have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*** The people responded by saying, ***All that the Lord has spoken we will do."***

God's Law was given with purpose – He wanted His people to be something different and holy. He wanted them to turn away from all the things that were worshipped by other people around them. When He gave His Law, God told them that He was a ***"jealous God."*** That meant that He wanted to protect His people and have them solely for Himself. There are no other true gods. Anything else is only an invention of man that is guided by Satan. The triune God is the only being who could rescue His people from their sin and give them fulness of life in a relationship with Him. That is why He urges them, ***"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the father's on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."*** Worshiping created things would destroy the relationship that God had established with them and result in tragic loss.

God's primary purpose for giving His Law was to shield His children from the spiritually toxic environment in which they would find themselves. The moral law was to be a curb to hold back the influence of Satan, the world, and even their own wild and disobedient flesh. God did not only give this Law to the Israelites, or only on Mt. Sinai. He actually gave it to all people by writing it upon their hearts. At creation this same Law to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves was joyfully received and treasured as a blessing.

B. Like the children of Israel, we know it is wrong to hurt or harm our neighbor, especially the husband or wife that God gives us. We know we should befriend those in need, respect our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and honor and cherish our spouse. We know we should respect our parents and all who are placed in authority over us. We know we shouldn't take our neighbor's property but help him or her improve and protect it. We know, but does knowing always translate into doing?

Knowledge of the Law did not prevent the Israelites from sinning against God. Soon after they received the Law from God, and promised to do all that He had spoken, they fell into gross sin and idolatry. They disobeyed God's will for them, and His Law condemned them. They were in the same condition as the rest of the world: sinful from the time their mother conceived them.

What does God's Law say to you once you jump its curb? It accuses! It condemns! We have broken all the Commandments so many times. This is when the Law serves as a mirror to show us what we really look like through God's eyes, and it is pretty ugly. No matter how hard we try, we just cannot keep the Law's demands, and make ourselves holy and beautiful in God's eyes by the things we do, or the sacrifices we make. Only God can make things right, and only He can make us holy and beautiful in His eyes.

There is no question that we are truly sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed, by the things we have done and the things we have left undone. The Law of God tells us what we should do, how we can please God and care for others, but the law of sin in us keeps rising up and doing evil. Like the Israelites before us we have promised to do all that the Lord has said, and soon afterward fell into sin and idolatry. What a mess!

II. Because Of Christ, We Walk In God's Law, And He Rejoices Over Us.

A. Since we, of ourselves, are powerless to do what is right, we have no hope without Christ! But thanks be to God, for all of us who were dead in our sins and trespasses, for all of us who promised to live new lives and then fell back into sin and idolatry, there is a sure and certain hope. Jesus Christ, God's only Son, came and took our place under the Law and under its accusation and condemnation. As the truly Holy One, He kept the Law for us perfectly and then offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to take our punishment. St. Paul declares to us: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*** You see, not only did Christ obey the Law for us, He empowers us to obey the Law...as we rightly should as the people of God.

B. Do not fool yourself into thinking that the Law has been abolished, so you can go on doing whatever you please. Christ did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. The Law still has an ongoing relevance in the world, and for your good. Jesus said, ***"until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."*** The Law still applies. It still has the power to curb our lusts to sin. It still has the power to accuse our guilty consciences. But for us who have been delivered it also has power to teach the new person in us, born of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism, to have new and holy desires. As He said to the Israelites at Sinai, the Lord says to us: ***"I am the Lord Your God Who delivered you from the realm of darkness and from slavery to sin and the devil. You have seen what I have done to Your enemy, and how I gave you my beloved Son to die and rise again to give you the victory. You know how I have carried you on the wings of eagles' and brought you to Myself to be my chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood to live in an everlasting relationship with me...here is my gift to you; My Law that if you will follow it as my people will bring you fulness of life with me."***

My friends in Christ, the Law of God is Good and Wise, a gift to offer us training in righteousness, so that we do the kinds of works that are good and pleasing to our heavenly Father. It no longer condemns because Christ has taken that away. Now, by the power of faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit, we can live as God's servants. We can have an abundant life as we live in a loving relationship with God and with sacrificial love for others. No better guide for living has ever been given than these Ten Commandments of God which He has offered for the good of His people. In Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, we want to live God-pleasing lives, as children of the light and of the day. As Paul writes: ***"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*** So, let the world belittle and mock God's Word, but we as the people of God will treasure it, and walk according to the Law of God – loving the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Amen.